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To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

SIR,

THE education of youth is a subject on which, although much has been said, and perhaps much done in some places of this Kingdom, yet it must be confessed much remains both to be said and done, even in this enlightened province. The necessity and importance of education to youth ought to be strongly felt by every friend to virtue, and in proportion to the strength of this feeling ought their anxious endeavours to be used in order to promote and encourage this great, this important national concern. In most towns of this province there is a pretty good opportunity of children being educated so far as appears necessary for transacting the common affairs of life, but it is the country schools, of which I intend to speak, and I hope in this I shall have the concurrence of many of your readers. The country in general is so badly supplied with schools, and these conducted on so bad a footing that to all appearance, if some means be not employed to prevent it, the great mass of the rising generation, will degenerate into ignorance, and consequently into barbarism. In many places of the country there is no school-house, and here the only means of educating their children is every summer (for in winter there is rarely any school) to entrust them to the care of some wandering school-master without knowing any thing either of his moral character or his capacity; both may perhaps be good, but if so, then it follows that it is a national disgrace, that men of good character and abilities have no better provision for their subsistence than by wandering from place to place, and often so reduced in appearance as not to be fit to be seen in any respectable company. But to return, the number of children in these schools is often so large, and being stowed up in some barn, where they have neither air, light, nor proper necessaries, it is not to be wondered at, even were the teacher's abilities very good, that their progress should be but small, besides the small pittance paid for wages in

these places will not afford any prospect of making a comfortable livelihood; therefore the number of school-masters is very much decreasing, although the increasing population of the country and the improved methods of teaching would require a very great additional number. In places where school-houses are built, from the smallness of the wages, and from the small number of scholars who attend in winter, the people are under the necessity of either employing a man whose capacity will not enable him to do better, or of wanting altogether instruction for their children; which I know is the case at the present time, in many places. In order to remove all these difficulties, in order to promote the happiness of the rising generation, who are entrusted by their Creator to the care of the more advanced in years, and in better circumstances, and for whose moral and religious education we all stand awfully responsible, let us turn our attention to the means necessary for that great end. This can only be done by exciting a laudable exertion among teachers, and endeavouring to increase their number, by paying men properly qualified a proper annual salary, and as there are many who are unable to be at the expense of paying properly for their children, I am confident there are many public spirited gentlemen, who would contribute largely for this valuable purpose; the government of the country too, no doubt would assist, were the application to come through a proper channel, as the members thereof must, in common with every reasonable man, be sensible of the great necessity there is for such an event, as well as the great benefits which arise to every well regulated community, from the proper education of youth. Were schools once regularly and conveniently established through the country, and properly conducted, a laudable emulation would arise among teachers, and they would take proper care to be duly qualified for their business, as they would then have the prospect of being rewarded for their trouble which is undoubtedly the best stimulus to exertion that can be used. If any of your numerous and respec-

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table readers will add any thing to these hints, they will it is hoped meet with that success which every virtuous endeavour merits.

A FRIEND TO YOUTH.

Saintfield, Jan. 12, 1809.

To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

NATIONAL SCHOOLS.

SIR,  
WHAT is the cause of the increasing immorality and irreligion of the present age, notwithstanding the rapid advances we are making in science and literature?

The system of education has been advancing gradually during the last 30 years, both in the useful and ornamental walks of northern literature; in the former of which our progress is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to the benevolent and ingenious MANSON. He contributed largely to the banishment of a difficult catechism, and the unintelligible cant of Hebrew names, and substituted in their room the allurements of emulation, the enlargement and culture of the soul, which have produced the fruits of temporal, and we trust, of eternal life, to many of the most respectable inhabitants of your flourishing town. Profiting by his example, others have improved upon his plan, and mere classics have been superseded by a regular course of mercantile learning, scientific classics, and polite literature. These scattered rays I shall rejoice to see collected into one focus in the capital of the North, and thence diverging in well tempered lustre from the majestic brow of Donnard, to the towering cliffs of Mangerton.

But let not mere theory, nor the glare of human learning dazzle our eyes so, that we shall not discover the gloom of infidelity, the false tapers of superstition, and the pitfalls of immorality, that encompass us on all sides. That religious impression has been on the decline for the last twenty years, we may see, from the general disregard of external ordinances, in the Northern Metropolis, from the thin attendance on public worship, from the general breach of the Sabbath, from the applause bestowed on loose

deistical observations in private companies, as well as from the instances of perjury, that so frequently trip the course of law in our courts of justice.

The party spirit, that some years since rendered oaths so common, and bent religion and morals to the madness that ruled the hour, was not a cause, but a consequence of this consumption of the soul. The true cause we shall find in our system of education, in our neglecting, or making a secondary consideration of what ought to be a primary consideration, viz. the teaching Christian duty as a distinct integral, and at the same time, a constituent part of modern education.

For though neither the Assembly's Catechism, nor the Scriptures ought to be used as constant school-books, lest the difficulty of them, as elementary books, might give an early distaste to light, life, and happiness, yet ought we not so fastidiously to reject our forefathers' prepossessions in favour of the Book of Life, as to banish it entirely from our schools. By this means, we have got rid of superstition indeed, but by the same new-fangled sweeping act, we have sent into exile all knowledge of the scriptures, domestic prayer, and religious impression. Religion is completely superseded by the news of the day, the rate of markets, speculation, embargo, farming, and slander.

Now, the cure I propose, is the introducing of the Scriptures into the Schools, at least one day in every week, selecting such passages as are most suitable to their tender capacities, and most impressive of the pious and moral principles of truth, honesty, peace, love to God, and love to our neighbour. The giving and requiring, alternately, the necessary explanation of such passages, without meddling with the peculiar tenets of any church, could not fail to rescue the rising generation from the fangs of ignorant infidelity. I shall probably in your next number, develop a very simple plan of reform; for the education of youth, that has engrossed my thoughts for some years past, and that, if adopted by government, would, I trust, give new life, system, and energy to